

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 26571 01 OF 02 131123Z
ACTION HA-02

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 IO-06 EA-06 L-01 INR-05
NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 SP-02 TRSE-00
OMB-01 PM-03 /046 W
-----107126 131250Z /44

R 131058Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0914
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 26571

LIMDIS/NOFORN

EO 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS:UNHCR, SREF, TH, MY
SUBJ: UNHCR HARTLING VISIT TO THAILAND

REF A. BANGKOK 26282 B. BANGKOK 26275 (NOTAL)

1. UNHCR POUL HARTLING VISITED THAILAND SEPTEMBER 4 -10, ACCOMPANIED BY SENIOR UNHCR OFFICERS FROM GENEVA. PURPOSE OF HARTLING'S TRIP WAS TO DEMONSTRATE HIS INTEREST IN INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROBLEM AND ASSURE THE RTG THAT THE UNHCR WOULD CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS BOTH IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEES IN THE COUNTRY AS WELL AS SECURING GREATER INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES. IN ADDITION, HARTLING HOPED TO MAKE A MAJOR EFFORT TO GET RTG AGREEMENT TO BEGINNING A JOINT UNHCR-THAI PROGRAM IN "SELF-SUFFICIENCY", I.E., LOCAL SETTLEMENT.

2. WHILE IN THAILAND, HARTLING TRAVELLED EXTENSIVELY, VISITING CAMPS AT NONGKHAI AND ARANYAPRATHET AND THE BOAT CAMP AT LAEMSING. IN ADDITION HE MET WITH PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK AND INTERIOR MINISTER LEK, AS WELL AS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 26571 01 OF 02 131123Z

PARTICIPATING IN AN INTENSIVE SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH THAI OPERATING OFFICIALS SEPTEMBER 7 - 8.

3. OVERALL, BOTH UNHCR AND THAI OFFICERS TELL US THAT, WITH ONE EXCEPTION, THE JOINT STATEMENT ISSUED SEPTEMBER 9 (REFTEL A) COVERS THE RANGE OF SUBJECTS DISCUSSED AND AGREEMENTS REACHED. HARTLING COMMITTED HIMSELF TO A

CDNTINUING EFFORT TO SECURE MORE INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES AND PROMISED TO RAISE QUESTION OF POSSIBLE EVENTUAL REFUGEE VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION WHEN HE VISITED HANOI AND VIENTIANE. HE ALSO ASSURED THE RTG THAT UNHCR WOULD CONTINUE ITS FUNDING OF REFUGEE PROGRAM IN THAILAND.

4. THE AREA OF SIGNIFICANT DISAGREEMENT AND SOME TENSION IN THE HARTLING VISIT RELATED TO THE SENSITIVE QUESTION OF LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND. HARTLING HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN ENCOURAGED BY HIS TALK WITH KRIANGSAK TO BELIEVE THAT RTG WOULD BE WILLING TO UNDERTAKE A SIGNIFICANT JOINT PILOT PROGRAM IN LOCAL SETTLEMENT; HOWEVER, IN THE SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SENIOR RTG OFFICIALS HE AND THE OTHER UNHCR OFFICIALS PUSHED TOO HARD ON THIS, WERE REBUFFED, AND HAD TO SETTLE ONLY FOR THE WORDING IN THE JOINT STATEMENT INDICATING THAT MEANS WOULD BE SOUGHT TO "ELABORATE A PILOT PROJECT FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY" (REF A). MINISTER LEK AND OTHER SENIOR OPERATING OFFICERS MADE CLEAR TO HARTLING AND HIS PARTY THAT LOCAL SETTLEMENT REMAINS A SENSITIVE ISSUE, AND WHILE THEY ARE PREPARED TO GO AHEAD WITHOUT PUBLICITY ON SOME PILOT PROJECTS, SUCH PROJECTS WOULD BE THAI-DESIGNED AND RUN. THAI OFFICIALS ALSO INDICATED THAT THEY WOULD MAKE NO COMMITMENT WITH REGARD TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT, BUT DID AGREE TO HOLD MORE DETAILED DISCUSSIONS ON POSSIBLE UNHCR SUPPORT FOR THAI PILOT PROJECTS IN THE FUTURE. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 26571 01 OF 02 131123Z

5. UNHCR-RTG MEETINGS WERE ALSO ORIGINALLY MARKED BY CONFUSION OVER THE UNHCR OFFICIALS' USE OF A WIDE RANGE OF FIGURES ON LEVELS OF FUNDING, BOTH FOR PILOT PROJECTS AND FOR CARE AND MAINTENANCE IN THE CAMPS. AT THE END OF THE FIRST DAY THAI OFFICIALS THOUGHT THAT ONE UNHCR FIGURE OF TWO MILLION DOLLARS, USED IN REFERENCE TO FUNDING OF PILOT PROJECTS IN LOCAL SETTLEMENT, REFERRED TO OUR PREVIOUSLY MADE USG OFFER. THIS CONFUSION WAS LATER CLARIFIED BY THE UNHCR OFFICIALS WHO MADE CLEAR THAT THE FUNDS WERE FROM THE UNHCR, NOT THE USG.

6. BOTH SIDES INDICATE THE DISCUSSIONS ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT WERE QUITE TENSE AND THE THAI WERE OBVIOUSLY ANNOYED BY THE UNHCR TACTICAL MISTAKE OF INTERPRETING THAI POLICY TO THAI OFFICERS, INCLUDING THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR, ON BASIS OF HARTLING'S DISCUSSION WITH PRIME MINISTER. THAI OFFICIALS ALSO PROFESSED RESENTMENT OVER HARTLING RAISING ISSUES ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT WITH THE PRIME MINISTER WHICH HAD NOT BEEN DISCUSSED PREVIOUSLY. AT THE SAME TIME THE UNHCR GROUP DID RECOGNIZE THAT THEY HAD PRESSED TOO HEAVILY AND RETREATED IN A MORE OR LESS

ORDERLY FASHION IN ORDER TO REACH AT LEAST SOME VERBAL
LEVEL OF AGREEMENT.
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7. COMMENT: UNFORTUNATELY, A GOOD PART OF THE CONFUSION
OVER LOCAL SETTLEMENT ISSUE WAS CAUSED BY PRIME MINISTER
KRIANGSAK'S PENCHANT FOR BEING LESS THAN CANDID WITH HIS

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 26571 02 OF 02 131131Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BANGKOK 26571

LIMDIS/NOFORN

VISITORS. IN THIS CASE, HARTLING TOOK THE PRIME MINISTE
MINISTER'S COMMENTS TOO LITERALLY, INTERPRETING THEM AS
COMMITMENTS. UNFORTUNATELY HARTLING FOUND OUT IN VERY
SHORT ORDER THAT THE THAI BUREAUCRACY HAS A DOMINANT
VOICE ON THIS ISSUE.

8. DESPITE THE OBVIOUS RELUCTANCE OF THE RTG TO MOVE
AHEAD ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT ALONG LINES PROPOSED BY UNHCR
(I.E., JOINT PROJECTS AND/OR A JOINT COMMITTEE ON
SETTLEMENT), BOTH WE AND UNHCR REP HERE BELIEVE THAT THE
HARTLING VISIT, ON BALANCE, WAS USEFUL. HIS EXPOSURE
TO THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AND TO THAI ATTITUDES ON LOCAL
SETTLEMENT WAS SOBERING AND HE DID COMMIT HIMSELF TO
CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT IN GETTING GREATER INTERNATIONAL
ACCEPTANCE OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. ON THE ISSUE OF
LOCAL SETTLEMENT WE ARE AT THIS POINT NOT SURE HOW MUCH
FURTHER AHEAD WE ARE AFTER HARTLING'S VISIT. THE LOCAL
UNHCR REP WANTS TO KEEP A LOW PROFILE ON THIS ISSUE OVER
THE NEXT WEEKS, ALTHOUGH WE DO EXPECT THERE WILL BE

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS.

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 26571 02 OF 02 131131Z

8. BASED ON OUR OWN CONVERSATIONS WITH SENIOR THAI OFFICERS IT IS CLEAR THAT THE THAI WILL NOT AGREE TO A PILOT PROJECT WHICH IS NOT OF THEIR OWN DESIGN OR APPEARS TO BE IMPOSED FROM THE OUTSIDE. AT THE SAME TIME MOI AND OTHER SENIOR THAI OFFICERS STILL PROFESS TO BE INTERESTED IN GOING AHEAD IN ACCEPTING AND IMPLEMENTING THE USG PROPOSAL FOR FUNDING LIMITED PILOT PROJECT IN LOCAL SETTLEMENT AND HAVE NOT COMPLETELY CLOSED THE DOOR TO THE UNHCR SUPPORT FOR PILOT PROJECTS. CONSEQUENTLY, AT THIS POINT, WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT A LETTER FROM THE AMBASSADOR AS RECOMMENDED REF B COULD BE THE CATALYST IN GETTING THAI MOVEMENT ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT. OBVIOUSLY WE WOULD CONTINUE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH UNHCR ON THIS. ABRAMOWITZ

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